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ABSTRACT

The pronoun system in Sinhalese, which is spoken in Sri Lanka, is examined based on a Sinhalese speaker's intuition and consultation with other native speakers. Spoken Sinhalese differs from the written language in having an entirely different pronoun system. Spoken Sinhalese provides a good example of social deixis because it encodes social relationships among the speech act participants. This paper shows both how the spoken pronoun system encodes proximity and social distance and how it is in agreement with the verb system in spoken Sinhalese. Examples illustrate that the first person pronouns do not differ according to social usage or any other variable, while the second person pronouns differ according to social class differences, and the third person pronouns may vary according to the proximity between the speaker and the referent. Contains 3 references. (Author/LB)

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SOCIAL DEIXIS IN SINHALESE:

The Pronoun System

Sunanda Tilakaratne

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Abstract: Some aspects of language show a close relationship between social structure and language structure. The pronoun system in spoken Sinhalese, which encodes social relationships among the speech act participants, thus provides a fine example of social deixis. This paper shows how this pronoun system encodes proximity and social distance among the speech act participants and its agreement with the verb system in spoken Sinhalese.

Language can be studied either as a logical system or as a form of social behavior. Language structure has evolved within the social context of the speech community (Labov 1972:183). One aspect of language which depicts close social structure is its set of deictic expressions. Social deixis is especially concerned with certain aspects of "the social situation in which the speech act occurs" Fillmore (1975:76). Social deixis includes the social identities and relations among the participants involved in the speech act.

The present study deals with the pronoun system in spoken Sinhalese, which encodes social structure. Since I did not find any written source on the deictic expressions in Sinhalese, I relied on my intution and consulted other native speakers of Sinhalese in getting this data.

Sinhalese is spoken on the island of Sri Lanka. It belongs to the Indic branch of the Indo-European language family. At present there are about 15 million people who speak this language. The grammar of spoken Sinhalese differs from that of the written language to a great extent. For example, even though the verbs of the written language have case endings, in the spoken language these endings are not used. Similarly, the written and spoken languages have two entirely different pronoun systems. I will concentrate on the pronominal forms of the spoken language in this paper, and compare them with the formal written forms when necessary for clarification.

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The formal grammar of written Sinhalese as it is presently taught in schools, universities or any other educational institutions in Sri Lanka shows a three way distinction in the pronoun system similar to that of English. The following table illustrates these forms.

Table 1. The Pronoun System of the Written Formal Grammar of Sinhalese

		Masc.		Feminine	
		Sing.	Plural	Sing.	Plural
1st Person	Subject	mama	api	mama	api
	Object	ma	apa	ma	apa
2nd Person	Subject	oba	obala	oba	obala
	Object	oba	obala	oba	obala
3rd Person	Subject	ohu	owuhu	æ̆ja	owuhu
	Object	he:	owun	æ̆:	owun

Table 1 shows the formal written Sinhalese pronouns. When we further examine the system, we find that Sinhalese, unlike well known languages such as English, French or German, shows a three-way distinction in the third person pronouns based on proximity between the speaker and the referent (see Table 2). The first division of the third person pronouns has the meaning `this person' (category a in Table 2). The proximity between the speaker and the referent is similar to that of the English demonstrative pronoun `this'.

meya liyuma liyay
this person letter will write.
This person will write the letter.

The second type, which has the meaning `that person' (category b in Table 2), is used when the referent is a bystander (i.e., close to the speaker and hearer) and the proximity between the speaker and the referent is similar to the English demonstrative pronoun `that'.

araya liyuma liyay
that person letter will write
That person will write the letter.

Table 2. Formal Written Pronouns and Their Spoken Equivalents Used among Socially Equivalent People

		Formal written Sinhalese		Spoken Sinhalese	
		Sing.	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
First person (male/female)	Subject	mama	api	man	api
	Object	ma	api	man	api
Second person (male/female)	Subject	oba	obala	oya	oyala
	Object	oba	oba	oya	oyala (oyagollo)
Third Person (a) Proximal					
	Subject male	mohu	mowuhu	meya	eyala
	female	ma ya	mowuhu	meya	eyala
	Object male	mohu	mowun	meya	meyala
	female	mæ :	mowun	meya	meyala (me:gollo)
(b) distal Person					
	Subject male	ohu	owuhu	araya	arayala
	female	a ja	owuhu	araya	arayala (aragollo)
	Object male	ohu	owun	araja	arajala
	female	aæja	owun	araja	arajala (aragollo)
(c) remote					
	Subject male	ohu	owuhu	eya	eyala
	female	aæya	owuhu	eya	eyala
	Object male	ohu	owun	eya	eyala
	female	aæja	owun	eya	eyala (e:gollo)

The third is used when the referent is in the vicinity (over there) of the speaker and the hearer or at another locale (similar in usage to the English third pronoun 'he') (category c in Table 2).

eya liyuma liyay
that person letter will write
That person (he) will write the letter.

Table two presents the forms that are used in formal written Sinhalese and also the spoken forms that are used by educated people.

This pronominal system is complicated by variations based on the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. It is difficult to distinguish one social class from another. Trudgill (1978) states:

> Social classes are not clearly defined or labelled entities but simply aggregates of people with similar social and economic characteristics; and social mobility- movement up or down the social hierarchy- is perfectly possible.

As Trudgill states, the three social classes (upper, middle and lower) are distinguished in this paper. Education, social status and economic status play a major role in identifying social classes in Sri Lanka, although it is not possible to indicate clear boundaries between classes. In general, this paper refers to upper, middle and lower classes in the following manner. The upper class usually consists of national political leaders and other politically and/or socially recognized people of the country. The lower class usually consists of socially inferior, poor people with minimum education (at most primary school education). The people belonging in between these two categories are considered as the middle class. The pronominal system in Sinhalese shows that there is a close inter-relationship between this social stratification and the language structure.

The pronominal system in Sinhalese can be considered as speaker-centered, since the 1st person pronouns mama 'I' and api 'we', do not vary according to social variables such as speaker-addressee relationship, situation or age. For example, the following utterances

could be used by any speaker irrespective of the social variables, situation, or age.

mama liyuma liyannam
I letter will write
I will write the letter.

api liyum liyannam
we letters will write
We will write the letters.

The second and the third person pronouns, on the other hand, vary according to the social status and the social relationship between the speaker-addressee and the speaker-hearer, as I will exemplify later in this paper.

The Second Person Pronoun:

The second person pronoun oya is used when the addressee is of equal status with the speaker.

oya liyuma liyanawada?
you letter write?
Would you write the letter?

Also, when the speaker and addressee both belong to the high or middle social classes this term may be used. Its plural counterpart is oyala. Although this pronoun does not show the gender distinction, it is used more by females than by males. This pronoun is used more in informal situations. In formal situations such as job interviews or meetings with government officers, the name of the addressee may be used instead.

When the addressee belongs to the low social class or when both the speaker and addressee belong to the low social class, the pronoun umba will be used. The plural counterpart is umbala.

umba liyuma liyapan
you letter write
You write the letter.

The middle social class or the upper social class may not use this pronoun among themselves. Also in formal situations such as interviews this pronoun is not used. When people climb up the social ladder from low to middle class, they usually cease to use this pronoun.

This pronoun is not affected by variation in age or gender distinction.

The pronoun tho has the same speech act participants as the pronoun umba; the difference is that tho is used when the speaker is in an angry mood or not well disposed towards the addressee. The feminine form of the pronoun is thi:. Both masculine and feminine pronouns have the same plural counterpart thopi.

tho gedara giya
you home went
You went home.

thopi gedara giya
you (plural) home went
You went home.

Table 3. The Second Person Pronoun and the Social Variables

	Masculine		Feminine	
	Sing.	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
1.Formal written	oba	obala	oba	obala
2.socially equal	oya	oyala	oya	oyala
3.socially inferior	umba/ tho	umbala/ thopi	umba/ thi	umbala/ thopi
4.socially upper	obatuma	obatumanla	obatumi	obatumila

2. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the middle class and higher class people when talking to each other.
3. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the lower social class and used by middle class or upper class people when addressing the socially lower class.
4. This line indicates the spoken forms used by socially lower class people when addressing socially upper class people.

The second person singular pronoun obatuma is used when the addressee belongs to the upper social class, while the speaker is of the lower class. This term may be heard when the addressee is a political leader or a high government official. Obatumanla is the masculine plural form of this pronoun. Regardless of the formality of the situation, this pronoun may be used. The feminine forms are obatumi (singular), and obatumila (plural).

obatuma gedara giyada?
you home went?
Did you go home?

obatumanla gedara giyada?
you (plural) home went?
Did you go home?

The Third Person Pronoun:

a) The Referent is Close to the Speaker

Table 4 shows the relationships between the social variables of the third person pronouns. The forms of this category vary according to the social status of the speech act participants. When both the speaker and the referent belong to the middle class or upper class, the pronoun meya is used. Other social variables such as age, or gender may not affect this pronoun, but the formality of the situation is a variable. This form is used in very informal situations. In formal situations the name of the referent (full name or the first name depending on the degree of formality of the situation) is used instead of the pronoun.

meya mata liyuma dunna
this person letter gave
This person gave me the letter.

The forms mu: or me:ka (these two forms are in free variation) are used when the referent belongs to a social class lower than the speaker, or when both the speaker and the referent belong to the socially lower class. Unlike the pronouns that are used by the middle class or the upper class, this pronoun shows a gender distinction. The pronoun me:ki is used when the referent is a female. The plural form of both masculine and feminine pronouns is mun. These pronouns may not be used

in formal situations, and variation in age does not affect their use.

mu: mata liyuma dunna
this person me letter gave
This person gave me the letter.

mun mata liyum dunna
these persons me letters gave
These persons gave me letters.

Table 4.
The Third Person Pronoun and the Social Variables When the Referent is Close to the Speaker

	Masculine		Feminine	
	Sing.	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
1.formal written	mohu	mowuhu	mæ̆ya	mowuhu
2.socially equal	meya	meyala	meya	meyala
3.socially inferior	me:ka/ mu:	me:kala/ mun	me:ki	me:kila mun
4.socially upper, adults	metuma	metumanla	metumi	metumiyanla

2. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the middle class and upper class people when talking to each other referring to the same class of individuals.
3. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the lower social groups and used by middle class or upper class people when referring to the socially lower class.
4. This line indicates the spoken forms used by socially lower class people when referring to the socially upper class people.

If the referent is a male member of an upper social class the term metuma is used. The feminine form of this pronoun is metumi and the plural forms are metumanla (masculine) and metumianla (feminine). The formality of the situation may not affect the usage of these pronouns but these forms are used mainly among adults.

metuma liyuma liyay
this person letter write
(masculine)
This person will write the letter.

metumiya liyuma liyay
this person letter write
(feminine)
This person will write the letter.

b) The Referent is a Bystander

When the referent is a bystander and when both the referent and the speaker belong to the same (upper or middle) social class, the pronoun araya is used. Age and gender do not act as variables for this pronoun. But this pronoun is more likely to be used in informal situations than in formal situations.

araya liyuma liyay
that person letter write
That person will write the letter.

When the referent is a bystander and both the referent and the speaker belong to the lower social class or when the referent alone belongs to a lower social class the pronouns araka (singular, masculine), or araki (singular, feminine), are used. The plural form of both masculine and feminine is arun.

araka liyuma liyay
that person letter write
(masculine)
That person will write the letter.

araki liyuma liyay
that person letter write
(feminine)
That person will write the letter.

Table 5.
The Third Person Pronoun and the Social Variables When the Referent is a Bystander

	Masculine		Feminine	
	Sing.	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
1. formal written	ohu	owuhu	æ2ya	owuhu
2. socially equal	araya	arayala	araya	arayala
3. socially inferior	araka/ aru:	arakala/ arun	araki	arakila/ arun
4. socially superior	etuma	etumanla	etumiya	etumiyanla

2. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the middle class and upper class people when talking to each other, referring to the same class individual.
3. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the lower social groups, and used by middle class or upper class people when referring to the socially lower class.
4. This line indicates the spoken forms used by socially lower class people when referring to the socially upper class people.

The forms etuma (masculine, singular) or etumi (feminine, singular) are used when the referent belongs to the upper class. The formality of the situation does not affect these pronouns. Generally the pronoun etuma has the meaning `that respectable person'. These two pronouns are also used in the same way as the English third person pronoun `he' or `she' when the referent is not necessarily present in the speech act situation.

etuma liyuma liyay
that person letter write
(masculine)
That person will write the letter.

etumiya liyuma liyay
that person letter write
(feminine)
That person will write the letter.

c) The Referent is in the Vicinity or Elsewhere:

When the referent is in the vicinity of the speech act setting or in another locale and when both the referent and the speaker belong to the same social class (either upper or middle social class) the pronoun eya is used. Age and gender do not act as variables of this pronoun and it is likely to be used in more informal situations.

eya liyuma liyay
he letter write
He will write the letter.

Table 6.
The Third Person Pronoun and the Social Variables when the Referent is in the Vicinity or Elsewhere

	Masculine		Feminine	
	Sing.	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
1. formal written	ohu	owuhu	eya	owuhu
2. socially equal spoken	eya	eyala	eya	eyala
3. socially inferior spoken	e:ka/ u:	e:kala/ un	e:ki	e:kila/ un
4. socially upper spoken	etuma	etumanla	etumi	etumiyanla

2. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the middle class and upper class people when talking to each other and referring to the individuals of the same class.
3. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the lower social groups and used by middle class or upper class people when referring to the socially lower class.
4. This line indicates the spoken forms used by socially lower class people when referring to the socially upper class people.

When the referent alone or both the referent and the speaker belong to the lower social class, the pronoun e:ka (plural e:kala) or u: (plural un) is used. Although these two pronouns seem to be in free variation, the forms u: and un are more frequently used than e:ka and e:kala. The feminine forms are e:ki (singular) and e:kila or un (plural). As in the case of the masculine, un is more frequent than e:kila. These pronouns do not differ according to the age of the speaker.

e:ka liyuma liyay
he letter write
He will write the letter.

e:ki liyuma liyay
she letter write
She will write the letter.

The pronouns etuma and etumi:, which are used when the referent is a bystander, are also used when the addressee belongs to the upper class.

etuma liyuma liyay
he letter write
He will write the letter.

etumiya liyuma liyay
she letter write
She will write the letter.

The pronoun system and the verb system

The verb forms also vary according to the above mentioned variations of the pronouns; each pronoun can be used only with its distinctive verb form. With the pronouns that would be used in addressing the upper and middle social class people, the same verb forms are usually used.

When addressing the upper class:

obatuma enda
you come
You come.

obatuma enawada?
you come?
Could you come?

Table.7 The Verb System

	come	go
1.socially equal	enda/enna	yanda/yanna
2.polite forms for socially equal people	aawanam endako enawada?	(giyanam)? yandako yanawada?
3.socially inferior	waren	palayan
4.upper	enawada?	yanawada?

1. Lines 1 and 2 indicate the verb forms used among the middle class and upper class people when talking to each other.

2. This line indicates the spoken forms used among the lower social groups, and used by middle class or upper class people when addressing the socially lower class.

3. This line indicates the verb forms used by middle class or lower class people when addressing the socially upper class people.

Verb forms among the upper and middle classes:

oya enda
you come
You come.

oya enawada?
you come.
Could you come?

Both verbs have the meaning 'come', but the second question form of the verb enawada is commonly used, since it is the more polite form.

If the verb form waren is used with the pronouns obatuma, or oya, that utterance would be socially unacceptable since the verb form does not 'socially fit' the pronouns. Also, with the pronoun umba only the verb forms waren 'come' or palayan 'go' can be used. Therefore, the following utterances can be regarded as socially unacceptable, but could be made socially acceptable in one of the ways following each example.

1. *obatuma waren
   you come

   a. obatuma enawada?
      you come

   b. umba waren
      you come

2. *obatuma genen
   you bring

   a. obatuma ge:nna
      you bring

   b. umba genen
      you bring

Similarly,

3. *oya waren
   you come

   a. oya enna
      you come

   b. umba waren
      you come

4. *umba enda
   you come

   a. umba waren
      you come

   b. oya enda
      obatuma enda
      you come

5. *umba ge:nda
   you bring

   a. umba genen
      you bring

   b. oya ge:nda
      you bring

There are many other verb forms that a speaker and an addressee may use in face-to-face interaction that have the similar two-way distinction: (1) a. those used among middle or upper class people, b. those used by middle or lower class people to address the upper social class c. those used by upper or lower class people to address the middle class people (Table 8 line 1), (2) the verb forms used by upper or middle class people when addressing lower class people or among the people belonging to the lower social class (Table 8 line 2). One important fact that should be mentioned here is that the second category of verbs are presently used more among the lower social class rather than between two different social classes. Some of the verbs are illustrated in table 8.

Table 8

	(1)	(2)
eat	kanna (eat) kanawada? (could you eat?)	ka:pan (eat)
drink	bonna (drink) bonawada? (could you drink?)	bi:pan (drink)
take	ganna (take) gannawada? (could you take?)	ganin (take)
bring	ge:nna (bring) ge:nawada? (could you bring?)	genen (bring)

write	liyanna (write) liyanawada? (could you write?)	liyapan
read	kiyawanna (read) kiyawanawada? (could you read?)	kiyawapan (read)
sleep	nidaganna (sleep) nidagannawada? (could you sleep?)	nidaganin (sleep)
think	hittanna (think) hitanawada? (could you think?)	hitapan (think)

Summary

The first person pronouns in Sinhalese do not differ according to social usage or any other variable. The second person pronouns differ according to social class differences. The singular and masculine forms of these can be illustrated as follows.

1. oya - Used by middle class and upper class people in addressing each other.
2. umba - a. Used by lower class people in addressing each other.
   b. Used by upper and middle class people in addressing lower class people.
3. obatuma- Used by middle class and lower class people in addressing upper class people.

Third person pronouns may vary according to the proximity between the speaker and the referent. The variations of the masculine, singular forms could be summarized as follows.

	proximal	distal	remote
1.	meya	araya	eya
2.	mu:	aru:	u:
3.	metuma	etuma	etuma

1. Forms used by middle class and upper class people when referring to the individuals of the same social class.
2. Forms used by upper and middle class people when referring to lower class people.
3. Forms used by middle class and lower class people when referring to upper class people.

A similar distinction can also be seen in the use of verbs. For example, upper and middle class people when addressing each other would use the forms yanna/yanawada? (go/can you go?). Same forms are used by those of lower class when addressing those of a class above them. However, people of upper or middle classes when addressing those of the lower class would use the forms waren (come) or palayan (go). Also, these forms are used often among the lower class people.

The pronoun system as well as verbs in spoken Sinhalese shows a close relationship between the social structure and the language structure.

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